

American Urban Radio Network

African American Entrepreneurs: Celebrating Progress and Still Making History

February 22, 2007

Remarks of Ronald N. Langston, National Director
Minority Business Development Agency
U.S. Department of Commerce

(491 words)

- Hello, this is Ron Langston, National Director of the Minority Business Development Agency, U.S. Department of Commerce, in Washington, DC.
- In recognition of **African American History Month**, all across the Nation, we are celebrating the past, present and future accomplishments of great African American men and women of our time.
- As the President noted, “African Americans are seizing opportunities gained at a great price, and they're making their mark in this wonderful country in countless ways.”
- At MBDA and the Department of Commerce, we especially appreciate the key role African American

entrepreneurs and corporate pioneers have played in economic development, empowerment and business enterprise.

- One such trailblazer was **James A. "Billboard" Jackson**, who rose within Esso Standard, (now known as Exxon). Because of Billboard Jackson's marketing efforts, Esso was considered the oil industry's leader in the early development of the African American market.
- Another pioneer was the late **Howard Naylor Fitzhugh**, who was known as "the Dean of Black Business." Fitzhugh became the first African-American to earn an MBA from Harvard Business School.
- From his position as a business educator at Howard University, he brought young people into the business field. And in 1965, he developed Pepsi-Cola's first targeted marketing effort to African-Americans.
- And we can't forget the impact of African American women entrepreneurs like the first black millionaire **Madame C. J. Walker**. Her legacy gave rise to other women entrepreneurs like **Cathy Hughes** who built a media empire with Radio One and TV One and of

course Oprah Winfrey of HARPO Productions in Chicago.

- In addition to these historic figures and household names, there are now more than **1.2 million African American business owners** who are investing in their local communities and creating jobs.
- Between 1997 and 2002, these firms generated close to **\$89 billion dollars** a year and **employed over 757 thousand people**.
- One such entrepreneur that MBDA is working with in Mobile, Alabama is **Clinton Barrows**. He is the largest owner and franchise operator of 29 Church's Chicken restaurants
- MBDA encourages and supports entrepreneurs like Mr. Barrows through our centers, which provide customized business management and technical services; and assistance with develop joint ventures, locating capital and winning contracts.

- To encourage more people to consider franchise ownership, MBDA has partnered with the **International Franchise Association**, and I have been invited to address the IFA national convention in Las Vegas regarding MBEs in franchising.
- Together, we will be co-hosting a panel discussion at **Howard Business School** during **Entrepreneurship Week USA**, which is February 24-March 3.
- Through entrepreneurship, we can create the type of ownership society that President Bush speaks of and what **Booker T. Washington** advocated.
- And we salute African American entrepreneurs, past and present who have helped to build America's economic legacy.
- On behalf of Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez and President George W. Bush Thank you.